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· THE MODERN ·
MARRIAGE MARKET

BY

MARIE CORELLI

LADY JEUNE

FLORA ANNIE STEEL

SUSAN, COUNTESS OF

MALMESBURY

The Modern Marriage Market

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By

Marie Corelli

Lady Jeune

Flora Annie Steel

Susan, Countess of Malmesbury

With Portraits

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By

MARIE CORELLI

I

AMONG the many ages or periods in this world's existence, — ages and periods which have been separated and classified, according to the fancy of historians, as the "Dark," the "Mythical," the "Classical," or the "Mediæval,"—it is doubtful whether there has ever been one which has so richly merited the pre-eminent and prominent label of "Sham" writ across it as this, our own blessed and

enlightened time. If any pride can be taken in the fact, let those who will be proud. For never in all the passing pageant and phantasmagoria of history did a greater generation of civilised hypocrites cumber the face of the globe than cumber it to-day,—never was the earth so oppressed with the weight of polite lying,—never were there such crowds of civil masqueraders, cultured tricksters, and social humbugs, who, though admirable as tricksters and humbugs, are wholly contemptible as men and women. Truth is at a discount, —and if one should utter it,

the reproachful faces of one's so-called "friends" show how shocked they are at meeting with anything honest. We are drifting our days away in a condition of false luxury,—of over-ripe civilisation,—which has bred in us that apathetic inertia which is always a premonitory symptom of fatal disease. If one should talk to us of heroic actions—even the simplest—our befuddled minds connect them vaguely with a necessity for the police or the law courts,—if we should hear of a bold man's attempt to scale the heights of a seeming too lofty ambition,

we express our sickly belief that he will fail,—and if he succeeds, we are, in the same sickly spirit, more disappointed than gratified. We cannot abide boldness. We are too weak in our nerves to stand the warm and splendid fervours of enthusiasm. We shudder—we cry—we whine at things that threaten to disturb our slothful self-indulgence,—our eating—our drinking—our sleeping in soft beds, guarded from draught and noise—our dear, pet vices — our morbid egotism—our blind, idiot vanity : we cannot endure troublous emotions—the great stress and

storm of heart which moulds noble character. Away with such! We cannot be expected to exert ourselves more than is absolutely necessary for the feeding of our bodies and the carrying of them about, carefully, to such places as may seem adequate for their entertainment and further nourishment. I am not speaking of the "millions underground,"—the vast, toiling, silent millions of unregarded and unrewarded workers, who labour out of sight as it were and with such ominous speechlessness,—the speechlessness being only for a time. I am addressing

you,—women, most of you,—who read the pages of this popular magazine * because you expect you will find something therein to minister to pleasure or vanity,—something in the way of advice on dress or the *toilette*, or the thousand-and-one little fascinations wherewith you hope to entrap the often silly souls of men,—not because you want to be told where you fail in the very mission and intention of Womanhood. Some of you are sincere enough, no doubt, in the wish to do the best with

* This article, and those which follow, appeared in *The Lady's Realm*, 1897.

the responsibilities invested in you: but "wishing to do" is one thing,—and "doing" is another. Most women of Society find it more than difficult to carry out the good intentions with which they have perhaps begun their careers; and the more exalted their position, the less, as a rule, are they able to withstand the temptations, follies, and hypocrisies which surround them. Follies, temptations, and hypocrisies surround in a greater or less degree all women, whether in Society or out of it,—and we are none of us angels, though to their credit be it said, that

some men still think us so. Some men still make "angels" out of us in spite of our cycling mania, — our foolish "clubs," where we do nothing at all,— our rough games at football and cricket, our general throwing to the winds of all dainty feminine reserve, delicacy, and modesty,—and we alone are to blame if we shatter their ideals and sit down by choice in the mud when they would have placed us on thrones. It is our fault, not theirs. We have willed it so. Many of us are more "mannish" than womanly; we are more inclined to laugh

at and make mock of a man's courtesy and reverence than we are to be flattered by it. The result is that nowadays we are married, both men and women alike, for what we *have*, and not for what we *are*.

It is one of our many hypocrisies to pretend we do not see things that are plainly put before us every day, and also to assume a fastidious disgust and horror when told of certain "barbarisms" still practised in Europe, barbarisms which we consider we have, in our state of ultra-civilisation, fortunately escaped. One of these "barbaric"

institutions which moves us to shudder gracefully and turn up the whites of our eyes, is slavery. "Britons never, never shall," we say. British women shall never, for example, stand stripped in the market-place to be appraised and labelled at a price, and purchased by a sensualist and ruffian for so much money down. No British man shall ever stand with bound hands and manacled feet, shamed and contemptible in his own eyes, waiting till some luxurious wanton of the world, with more cash than modesty, buys him with her millions to be her fetch-and-carry

slave till death releases him from the unnatural bondage. These things are done in Stamboul. True. Stamboul is barbaric. What of London? What of the "season," when women are as coolly "brought out" to be sold as any unhappy Armenian girl that ever shuddered at the lewd gaze of a Turkish tyrant? What of the mothers and fathers who force their children thus into the open market? Come—face the thing out—don't put it away or behind you as a matter too awkward and difficult of discussion. It is an absolute grim

fact that in England, women—those of the upper classes, at any rate—are not to-day married, but bought for a price. The high and noble intention of marriage is entirely lost sight of in the scheming, the bargaining, and the pricing.

What *is* marriage? Many of you have, I think, forgotten. It is not the church, the ritual, the blessing of the clergyman, or the ratifying and approving presence of one's friends and relations at the ceremony,—still less is it a matter of "settlements" and expensive millinery. It is the taking of a solemn vow before the Throne of the

Eternal,—a vow which declares that the man and woman concerned have discovered in each other his and her true mate,—that they feel life is alone valuable and worth living in each other's company,—that they are prepared to endure trouble, poverty, pain, sickness, death itself, provided they may only be together,—and that all the world is a mere grain of dust in worth as compared to the exalted passion which fills their souls and moves them to become one in flesh as well as one in spirit. Nothing can make marriage an absolutely sacred

thing except the great love, combined with the pure and faithful intention, of the human pair involved. They have to realise first of all that a God exists ; and that before that God, Whom they solemnly acknowledge and believe in, they are One.

What has the cash-box to do with this ? The reply will be that in order to live, one must have the wherewithal for living. Quite so. But then, if it be once fully realised that there is a Supreme Creator of things, to Whom we are answerable for the breaking of any of His laws, we shall understand that

no two human beings have a right to share each other's lives at all, if the result of such sharing should be to *drag each other down.* Marriage is intended to uplift — to consecrate — to inspire,— and while these noble duties cannot altogether be properly fulfilled if extreme poverty bars the way, and starvation looks in at the door, it is not at all necessary that the married pair should be so grossly and vulgarly wealthy as to be free of every shadow of difficulty. Shadows of difficulty show best where love's sunshine falls. We are never as strong,

as sweet, or as true as we might be if we lack the divine difficulties which nerve us to fresh endeavour. It is as easy —perhaps easier—to be happy on five hundred a year, as on five thousand, and a study of the faces of those who possess a hundred thousand a year will move us more to compassion than envy.

I know an artist who lives on the Island of Capri,— a perfectly happy man. He earns about one hundred pounds per annum by painting charming little studies of the beauties of the island, and disposing of them whenever he can to chance visitors. He is a

gentleman by birth, breeding, and education,—he is essentially one in manners, and excels in the almost lost art of conversation. He is passionately in love with his wife, —a pretty, coaxing little creature of the fair Sicilian type,—and he adores his son, a sturdy small person of three years, whose exquisite baby beauty is the delight of every inhabitant of the place. Nature surrounds the little trio with her loveliest scenery—the melting charm of sea and sky and island picturesqueness is theirs to enjoy from every window of their flower-wreathed habitation, and they crave for nothing more than

they possess. "We love each other," is the simple secret of the idyllic life they lead; and when you have been at one of the merry little Bohemian suppers which the artist often gives to friends coming over from Naples to Sorrento,—when in the warmth of the Italian night the windows are set wide open to let the white moon light up with her full Southern brilliance the unpretentious "feast" of luscious fruit and genuine wine, and your fair hostess leans against the rose-twined porch, softly playing her mandolin in subdued accompaniment to the gay songs of her guests,—you begin to think

you have found something like the lost paradise,—which, after all, was only a paradise just so long as the human beings in it were content to obey their Maker's commandment. Beyond that commandment lay the forbidden tree,—the sting of the serpent-devil, and afterwards distrust—mutual reproach and misery.

It is the same now as it was then—the old Biblical legend can be fitted to ourselves every day and every hour of the day. God's laws exist,—and chiefest of them all is the Law of Love. Twist that great mandate into a decree of Mammon, and you have

blotched with crime the bright face of the universe. The artist of Capri is happier than many a millionaire, and a hundred times better-looking than most. Nature has done her best for him in all respects,—has given him a fine face and figure, a fearless look, superb health, and complete enjoyment of life,—what more does any one want out of the vast storehouse of creation?

It is what we are all fighting and struggling for—life and the enjoyment of life: this man has it on a simple hundred pounds a year. And if another man as good, as handsome, as simple-

hearted, and as worthy of respect, were to ask one of our modern young Englishwomen to-day to try and love him *on that income*, she would find her heart singularly impervious to his wooing, depend upon it! If he suggested living in some lovely nook of the world, where life is cheaply and easily maintained, such as Capri, she would begin to mope at the mere idea of the "dulness" involved—and why? Because Love is not sufficient for her. Because in the rush of our time we are trampling sweet emotions and true passions under foot, and marriages are seldom the result of affection

nowadays,—they are merely the carrying out of a settled scheme of business. Mothers teach their daughters to marry for a "suitable establishment": fathers, rendered desperate as to what they are to do with their sons in the increasing struggle for life and the incessant demand for luxuries which are not by any means actually necessary to that life, say, "Look out for a woman with money." Heirs to a great name and title sell their birthrights for a mess of American dollar-pottage,—and it is a very common every-day sight to see some Christian virgin sacrificed on the altar of

matrimony to a money-lending, money-grubbing son of Israel.

Bargain and sale,—sale and bargain,—it is the whole *raison d'être* of the "season,"—the balls, the dinners, the suppers, the parties to Hurlingham and Ascot. Even on the dear old Thames with its delicious nooks, fitted for pure romance and heart betrothal, the clatter of Gunter's luncheon-dishes and the popping of Benoist's champagne-corks remind the hungry gypsies who linger near such scenes of river revelry that there is not much sentiment about—only plenty of money being wasted. Here, for instance,

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is a little river-study taken from life :—

Time : late evening. Scene : Cookham. Sky-effect : moonrise. *Dramatis personæ :* He and She, lolling each in a deck-chair on a luxuriously fitted house-boat.

HE : I heard a lot this season about the way you were going on with that poor devil of a So-and-So,—people said you were fond of him, dontcherknow.

SHE (*casually*) : Did they ? So I was. Awfully fond. But he hadn't got any oof-bird.

HE : Oh ! Then I suppose he's "off" ?

SHE : Off ? I should think so !

Why—(*this with deep contempt*) he's become a *digger.*

HE (*laughing*): Costume will suit him down to the ground. Rather good-looking fellow—fine figure and all that—jolly sort of chap. I say, then, if he's "off" I'm on—eh?

SHE: If you like. I told you it would be all right when your governor died. Couldn't settle up till then. He might have lived ever so long.

HE: So he might. But he hasn't. He's gone, sure enough. Then it's a tie?

SHE: It's a tie. No—don't kiss me—I don't feel like it.

HE (*chuckling*): Don't you? Well, I suppose you have got to be taken in the humour. I don't feel like it either, now I come to think of it.

SHE: I am quite sure you don't. It's so idiotic, you know.

HE: I bet you kissed the digger fellow. Come, didn't you?

SHE: I may have done. I don't remember. Anyhow, it isn't your business. I want some ices.

HE: Waiter! Ices! And a brandy-and-soda! (*Slow music. Song by nigger-minstrels—"Won't yer ketch 'im when yer sees 'im."*)

[CURTAIN.

This kind of wooing is the way Mammon teaches his sons and daughters to jest with the most divine emotions of life,—and the spirit of *fin de siècle* cynicism and mockery pervades all the preliminaries of marriage and marriage itself, to work dire results of discontent and wretchedness hereafter. For Nature will not be baulked of her rights. She gave us brains wherewith to think—hearts wherewith to feel —emotions to respond to every touch of human tenderness and sympathy—minds to educate in such wise that they should be able to grasp and realise all the

dear and holy responsibilities of life; and when we will neither think nor feel, nor respond, nor be educated, nor realise what we were made for, she takes her vengeance upon us — and an appalling one it sometimes is. There can be nothing more hideous, more like a foretaste of hell itself, than the life-to-life position of a man and woman who have been hustled into matrimony, or rather, as I prefer to put it, sold to each other for so many thousands per annum, and who, when the wedding-fuss is over, and the feminine "pictorials" have done

gushing about the millinery of the occasion, find themselves alone together, without a single sympathy in common, — with nothing but the chink of gold and the rustle of bank-notes for their heart-music,—and with a barrier of steadily-increasing repulsion and disgust rising between them every day.

And this is what happens in nine cases out of ten in fashionable modern matrimony. "A marriage has been arranged" is a common phrase of newspaper parlance,—and it has one advantage over most newspaper forms of speech—namely, that

of being strictly and literally true. A marriage is "arranged" as a matter of convenience or social interest; lawyers draft settlements and conclude the sale,—and a priest of the Most High God is called in to bless the bargain. But it is nevertheless a bargain,—a trafficking in human bodies and souls, as open and as shameless as any similar scene in Stamboul.

And yet there *is* liberty in our land if we will only avail ourselves of the glorious privilege. Women are free to assert their modesty, their sense of right, their desire for truth and

purity, if they only will. Is it too much to ask of them that they should refuse to be stripped to the bosom and exposed for sale in the modern drawing-rooms of the "season"? Is it too much to ask that, in their natural and fitting desire to be suitably wedded, they should look for men rather than money, —love rather than an "establishment,"—mutual sympathy and understanding rather than so much heritable property in houses and lands? And may not it even be suggested that men should be manly enough to refuse to set themselves forth in

the market as "Heir to the estate of So-and-So, worth so much in hard cash"—or "Only lineal descendant of the Earl of So-and-So,—anxious to sell title, with body and soul attached to it, to any woman who can give the adequate millions necessary for immediate purchase"? A man who marries a woman for her money only is really one of the most despicable objects in existence. He who by natural law was intended to be the supporter, becomes the supported, —he who by every proud prerogative of manhood is formed to be the conqueror and pro-

tector, is tamed and tied like a feeble nursling to a woman's apron-string,—he loses the right to exert his independence, and must submit to be henpecked, "nagged at," or else treated with a callous indifference, and sometimes an infinite contempt.

The woman who marries for money is quite as blameworthy, and is likely to find her position equally as aggravating, only in another way. The man who has the "chinks" will never throw her poverty at her as a fault in the blunt and coarse terms which many a wealthy woman uses to a dependent

husband,—but he will involuntarily show her, by a thousand little unmistakable signs, that he knows he has bought her,—and even in the very lavishness of his gifts to her she will gradually come to realise the "position" she holds with regard to him—namely, one of social dummy, household figure-ornament,—while he, free as air, amuses himself with other women, and soothes any pricking of his conscience by the reflection that after all, as his wife, she has everything she wants in the way of dress and jewels, food and firing, and that, in all the necessary items of

sustenance and comfort, he has done his duty by her.

The real fact of the matter is that marriage is nothing more nor less than a crime if it is entered upon without that mutual supreme attraction and deep love which makes the union sacred. It is a selling of body into slavery,—it is a dragging down of souls into impurity. The passion of love is a natural law, —a necessity of being,—and if a woman gives herself to a man in marriage without that love truly and vitally inspiring her, she will in time find that the "natural law" will have its way,

and attract her to some other than her lawful husband, and drag her steadily down through the ways of sin to perdition.

I am addressing myself especially to women. In a woman's life *one* love should suffice. She cannot, constituted as she is, honestly give herself to more than one man. And she should be certain—absolutely, sacredly, solemnly certain—that out of all the world that one man is indeed her pre-elected lover, her chosen mate,—that never could she care for any other hand than his to caress her beauty,—never for any other kiss than

his to rest upon her lips,—and that without him life is but a half-circle, waiting completion.

How much of this kind of "certainty" enters into the "arrangements" of a fashionable marriage? How many women, as they pass up to the altar in all the glory of their bridal finery, are actually proud and happy to take the vows of love and fidelity? Very few. Yet it *should* be a proud moment for any woman; it should be the height of her life's triumph to submit to the mastery of love. Only, unfortunately, it is seldom this divine mastery of love which

dominates her; it is a weak compound of toleration and resignation, mixed up with pounds, shillings, and pence,—a farce of society fuss and feigning, in which poor Love gets crowded out altogether, and hastily spreads his wings for flight. He is the last of all the mythical gods to be tempted or cajoled by lawyers and settlements, wedding-cake and perishable millinery. His domain is Nature, and the heart of humanity,—and the gifts he can bestow on those who meet him in the true spirit are marvellous and priceless indeed. The exquisite joys he can teach,—

the fine sympathies,—the delicate emotions,—the singular method in which he will play upon two lives like separate harps, and bring them into resounding tune and harmony, so that all the world shall seem full of luscious song,—this is one way of love's system of education. But this is not all: he can so mould the character, temper the will, and strengthen the heart, as to make his elected disciples endure the bitterest sorrows bravely,—perform acts of heroic self-sacrifice, and attain the most glorious heights of ambition; for, as the venerable Thomas à Kempis tells

us, "Love is a great thing, yea, a great and thorough good; by itself it makes everything that is heavy light, and it bears evenly all that is uneven. For it carries a burden which is no burden, and makes everything that is bitter sweet and tasteful. Though weary it is not tired, though pressed it is not straitened, though alarmed it is not confounded, but as a lively flame and burning torch it forces its way upward and securely passes through all."

Is not such divine happiness well worth attaining? Is the cash-box better? And will the

possession of jewels, gold, and estates, be of any avail as consolation in the hours of pain and loss? Think well about it, fair women, before deciding your destinies; and if you are inclined to shudder at the way in which your human sisters are sold in Stamboul, put a stop to the preparations you are making for selling yourselves. The London market will be open to you in May, and the bidders will assemble as usual. They will consider your value in face, figure, skin, eyes, hair, and general complexion. They will note in slang parlance as to

whether you are "well-groomed" (*i.e.*, well-dressed), just as they note the condition of their thoroughbred mares. They will look at you with the egotistical tolerance of men who have money and know that they are worth marrying. Your pretty ways, your little smiles, your blushes, your graceful attitudes, will be discussed at the clubs and restaurants in various forms, as, "She knows how to do it," or, "She is laying a neat trap for me," or, "I expect I shall have to give in to her in the long run," and certain other chuckling assertions of a like

kind; and if you come up to the expectations of the Jews or the Gentiles, who are thus estimating your qualities, you will be sold.

That is, if you choose to be marketable commodities. It rests with you. You are not bound to listen to one of your own sex who asks you, as I do, in plain words *not* to sell yourselves. But if you do listen, albeit only for a moment, I shall not have written quite in vain. I want you to refuse to make your bodies and souls the traffickable material of vulgar huckstering. I want you to *give* yourselves

ungrudgingly, fearlessly, without a price or any condition whatsoever, to the men you truly love, and abide by the results. If love is love indeed, no regret can be possible. But be sure it *is* love,—the real passion, that elevates you above all sordid and mean considerations of self—that exalts you to noble thoughts and nobler deeds,—that keeps you faithful to the one vow, and moves you to take a glorious pride in preserving that vow's immaculate purity;—be sure it is all this, for if it is not all this, you are making a mistake, and you are ignorant of the

very beginnings of love. Try to fathom your own hearts on this vital question; try to feel, to comprehend, to learn the responsibilities invested in womanhood,—and never stand before God's altar to accept a blessing on your marriage if you know in your own inmost soul that it is no marriage at all in the true sense of the word, but merely a question of convenience and sale. To do such a deed is the vilest blasphemy — a blasphemy in which you involve the very priest who pronounces the futile benediction. The saying "God will not be mocked"

is a true one; and least of all will He consent to listen to, or ratify such a mockery as a marriage-vow sworn before Him in utter falsification and misprisal of His chiefest commandment—Love. It is a wicked and wilful breaking of the law and is never by any chance allowed to remain unpunished.

By

LADY JEUNE

II

THE inevitable controversy as to the improvement or deterioration of one age over another still continues, and no comparison is ever satisfying. It is so easy to generalise and so difficult, when we particularise, to arrive at any accurate deduction. Each age has its vices and weaknesses, which alter according to the condition and influences which are then existing; and to say that one time is worse or better because

the particular characteristics we contemplate have altered or disappeared, is entirely misleading. An idyllic life of peace and contentment, away from the storm and stress of life, is theoretically perfect, but it is perfectly possible for such a life to develop the worst qualities of mankind. Egotism, self-indulgence, indolence, and a thousand other weaknesses might ride rampant under such conditions; while in an existence where luxury, wealth, and pleasure appeared to be the sole ambition, some of the noblest virtues of humanity might exist. Therefore, in generalising and condemning

the weaknesses of the age in which we live, we are apt to form too hasty conclusions of the life which we see around us, and in condemning its weaknesses to lose sight altogether of the higher and better part which lies close beside.

Human nature is stronger than all the forces and influences opposed to it, and it does not alter materially, though conditions of life, and changes, modify it. We are always inclined to be pessimistic in comparing the time in which we live with the past. We are always being told that we were once more virtuous and

brave, more simple and self-reliant; that our women were more beautiful, our men more Spartan and courageous; that modern civilisation, and the gigantic changes which the nineteenth century has witnessed, have demoralised and degraded us; and that the great qualities which inspired the makers of our Empire have died away in an effete and worn-out civilisation.

If we were to admit the accuracy of all the conclusions at which the pessimists arrive, it would still be possible to prove that a "remnant" remains, sufficiently pure and wholesome

to mitigate greatly the evils that undoubtedly exist ; but we maintain—and it is easy to prove our contention—that the pessimists are wrong, and that not only are we not worse in the main than our forefathers, but that our times have called into existence qualities of the highest nature, which could be only produced by the particular conditions of to-day.

It is impossible, in the complex life of our time, that there should not be a large and powerful element in society whose influence is not altogether for good. The great wealth and luxury of to-day must produce effects which

are demoralising and weakening to the characters of those who live under their influence; but every age has had the same evil, though perhaps to a less intensified degree. Where there is great wealth there must be great extravagance and display; but if only controlled and properly directed, its effect may benefit the community.

A demand for luxuries means employment to many poor people. Large entertainments, with all their accessories—smart clothes, carriages, and all the adjuncts of wealth which modern moralists condemn—have, after all, some

advantages; and those who live in London and work amongst the poor can truthfully testify to the vast difference in their comfort and prosperity when a season is a good one, and to the severe pinch of poverty when the spending power of the wealthy classes is curtailed. Therefore, while deploring and admitting evils which are the inevitable result of an age of luxury and expenditure, one cannot help feeling that the outburst against them is sometimes exaggerated, because people are too apt to jump to hasty conclusions from not carefully analysing the criticisms they make.

The Modern

A very powerful indictment against the evils of modern Society appears in these pages from the pen of one of the most popular writers of to-day —one who has studied human nature, and knows much of the life of to-day; and while admitting that some of her criticisms are accurate, we think she is a little carried away by a righteous feeling of indignation at some things which belong to every age and society, and are not in themselves a definite sign of the decadence of this. It is very easy to write the word "Sham" across this age, and by a free

and hasty generalisation to condemn it—to make it seem as if courage, heroism, and all other manly qualities have disappeared in a "slothful self-indulgence," and that the aim of our life is to shut our eyes and ears to everything save the gratification of the lowest desires of human nature. We fail to see any signs of such a decadence when we know that for every post of danger and responsibility there are thousands of men ready to volunteer, and glad to serve their country, giving their life for the pay that a well-paid artisan would not look at. In the daily

record of the papers we read of acts of heroism and self-sacrifice which show no indication of a decay of the heroism and bravery which have been the glorious characteristics of our race. In great shipwrecks, in the terrible naval disasters of the last few years, the same cool, heroic courage has been displayed, not only by the officers, but the men —as, for instance, when the *Victoria* was sinking. The taking of Chitral, the march on Dongola, are incidents in our history just as glorious, though of less importance than some in more well-known military expeditions.

They all prove that when the necessity arises England can send her sons to fight her enemies with the same confidence as of old, knowing that they will prove themselves as worthy as the veterans of Trafalgar and Waterloo.

Our vast colonial empire, which is the growth of this "effete" century, is surely an unanswerable argument to the cry that we have become unable to hold our own in the council of the nations. Wherever new fields of enterprise and colonisation are opened, there English men and women are found ready to people them; and it is

because they possess the qualities which we are now told are in a state of decay that they succeed where every other people fail. It seems to us, in this age of independence, that there never was a time when self-reliance and individuality were so pre-eminently the characteristics of a people; and that, so far from having sunk into a condition of decay, we are as ready as ever to emulate the deeds of our sires.

In the history of any Western country the influence which women exercise must largely affect its destinies: where the women are strong and virtuous a

country must prosper in just the same proportion as it will decay if they are the reverse. The change that has come over the lives of women in England during the last thirty years is so remarkable that it cannot but have produced enormous differences in English life and society; and opinions will always differ as to whether it is beneficial or the reverse. For our part we have no hesitation in saying it is all for good. There may be excrescences and anomalies which the large measure of independence women now enjoy have created, and which time will modify, and

has, indeed, already modified. But when we contrast the position of women now with that of thirty years ago, the change is surely for good. If the sexes were equally distributed, and every woman could become a wife and follow the natural career which nature intended for her, the changes which so many deplore would perhaps never have come—or certainly much more tardily. But in a community where the female element is largely in excess of the male, and where modern thought and education have raised them intellectually on a more equal basis, it was not

possible for women to remain the colourless, dependent creatures of the past. And as they have become emancipated they have more or less chosen their own careers, and thousands of women are now living proofs of the advantages of a change that has given them an aim in life which they can pursue successfully.

In our very complex state of society there must necessarily be great varieties and differences in the lives of the different sets into which so large a society must be divided, and we cannot deny that there are aspects of modern life which we deplore. Whether such

conditions are worse than formerly must ever be an undecided question ; but that we have done with the coarseness and brutality of the last century no one will deny. Where there are great riches, a high standard of comfort and luxury, and a moneyed class, there must be extravagance and less moral restraint than in a more primitive state, where the conditions of existence are harder and the life is more simple. An existence such as Marie Corelli tells us of is poetical and idyllic to the highest degree ; but in our country, and under the conditions of modern life, it is an

impossible one. It does not, however, necessarily follow that a life equally pure and happy is impossible in our modern Babylon. "Love in a cottage" is a delicious thing, but the wherewithal to provide the cottage and its accessories is an absolute necessity. The higher standard of comfort which modern society requires, without any superfluities, makes marriage more difficult than formerly, not because there is not the same capacity for affection and self-denial among us, but because the whole conditions of our life have changed and are still changing; and it

must be evident to the most Spartan of us that, however simple and rugged may be our theories, it is an impossibility to carry them out in their entirety. The modern mother is not the heartless, selfish creature described to us because she shrinks from letting her daughter link her life with some one (however deep her attachment to him may be) who cannot at least provide her with the necessaries of life. We think that Marie Corelli is mistaken in drawing the picture she has done of the "modern marriage market." The same reproaches have always been heaped on Society which

she makes; women have always been accused of sacrificing their daughters for money, for the sake of the jewels and settlements of a rich husband; and the cry of the "slave market" is as old as the world itself. But is it true? Or rather, is not the accusation so grossly exaggerated as to be as false as if there were no foundation for its existence? There are, and always have been, women who are sufficiently worldly to allow and even to persuade their daughters to marry for the material advantages which a rich husband can provide; but that such women represent the average

mother is an accusation we distinctly deny. There may be circumstances surrounding some marriages which lend colour to the suggestion that girls have sold themselves for money; but such cases are exceptions, and because some exist it is false to affirm that all are the same.

In the same way we object and protest most strongly against Marie Corelli's statement that girls are "brought out" in the "season" to be sold as "any unhappy Armenian girl"—a statement as false as it is ridiculous. Does she really believe that the bright, happy, pretty

girls we see in London ball-rooms all go there for the purpose of exhibiting their charms to the richest and most desirable suitor? Does she think that every girl starts in life with the avowed and open intention of making the best of her looks for such a purpose? We say that such an idea is monstrous; absolutely false of the girls, and equally untrue and unjust as regards their mothers. In the heart of every girl lies the hope that some day she may marry the man she loves, and, in joining her life with his, taste the sweet joys of life together; but the thought is

one quite apart and outside any of the motives which make her wish to go into the world, or add to the enjoyment of her season.

Girls enjoy society because of the fun, the gaiety, the change, and the wholesome excitement which a season gives them, and not because in the distance they see the millions and the millionaire they are supposed to be hunting. Take any young, wholesome-minded girl with a happy home, and suggest such a thing, and see her indignant denial of an accusation the thought of which had never darkened the pleasure of her life. If we watch

girls in ball-rooms or in following any of their amusements, listen to their hearty laugh, and see the bright, happy expression of their faces, and the zest with which they throw themselves into all they do, can we honestly say that we see a trace of the demoralising influences which Marie Corelli tells us are sapping all that is pure and sweet in their nature? If such an accusation as Marie Corelli's were true, it certainly needs more confirmation than the facts she brings forward to prove it, and our experience leads us to regard it from an entirely opposite point

of view. We agree with her that women, to use her own expression, are much more "mannish" than formerly; and that has grown out of the greater freedom and independence they now enjoy. It may have taken away some of the dependence and softness of women, but it has given them a strong individuality, strong opinions, and an independence which makes anything like maternal coercion an impossibility. Girls think and act for themselves, and have their own most distinct ideas on all subjects; and any mother would find it very difficult—nay, almost impossible—

to force her daughter to marry a man solely because he was hugely rich. With a gentle, docile nature, without much strength of character or will, persuasion, or even stronger measures, might influence them; but the majority of girls could not be forced to such a step. Nay, we go still further, and say that there are, we believe, very few women who would urge their daughters to marry a man they did not love.

Girls may marry hastily, perhaps marry too young, without knowing their own minds; but in these days no girl is forced

into a marriage that is repugnant to her because her mother wishes it, and there are few women wicked and cruel enough to blast the life of their child by acting as Marie Corelli would have us believe. Every year the increased independence which girls enjoy, and the feeling of the time in which they live, make them less anxious to marry, or to marry so early; and their position with regard to men and the feeling of *camaraderie* which exists between the young of both sexes do not tend to increase a girl's desire to take a husband. Marie Corelli says

truly, "Nature will not be baulked of her rights; she gives us brains to think, hearts wherewith to feel, emotions to respond to every touch of human tenderness and sympathy, minds to educate in such wise they should be able to grasp and realise all the dear and holy responsibilities of life." Because this is so, it is also true that modern thought and education make mothers realise those responsibilities with regard to their children, and so refrain from using any influence except what tends to their happiness; and the same influences also make girls

understand the profanation and wickedness of a loveless marriage.

We can hardly believe that the little sketch of a waterside proposal which Marie Corelli gives us is descriptive of any class of society. We cannot, of course, presume to guess how the question is asked or answered, the question that is old as time and yet sweet and fresh as the spring flowers; but we are certain Marie Corelli does not know either, and we cannot suppose she expects us to take the two actors in her little comedy as typical of English life and

manners; for however barren a marriage may be of any sentiment or passion, we hardly think it possible a proposal of marriage could be conveyed in such language or accepted in a like fashion. We cannot help feeling that Marie Corelli generalises too much, and takes a class, and a very small class, as typical of the whole of English Society.

If what she says is the case, the society in which we live is indeed corrupt and rotten to the core, and the end to which it is tending must be utterly disastrous. But we are sure she is wrong—wrong in her facts and

her conclusions. The mass of English men and women are as strong and morally pure as their predecessors. There never was an age when the standard of life was higher, or the obligations and responsibilities of wealth and position were more recognised, than the present.

In selecting a very small clique as typical of the whole of English Society, Marie Corelli has overstated her case; and if we look around us, among the people to whom we belong and to the wider circle of English homes, we see that she is mistaken in every respect. There may be

people whose life and example are bad; that we do not deny: but we say that the whole of English Society is essentially pure, and the standard of life and morality a high one. There may be cases where a *mariage de raison* is the only alternative left to a woman, and there may be women who, from circumstances of poverty or necessity, are driven to marry men with whom they are not in love; but all these are exceptions, and the ordinary English marriage is one of affection and sympathy. If any other reason but this was the rule, where would be all

the happy homes we see around us? How, otherwise, can we account for the peaceful and happy family life which is so distinctively English and of which we are so justly proud?

There are spots on the sun, and there is no such a thing as an ideal society. Perfection in this world is what we are all striving after, and which, like the magician's stone, is not to be found. Our ideals are high, even if we do not attain to them, and no Englishwoman would, we imagine, admit that the picture which Marie Corelli draws of the English is correct.

We do not deny that there may have been, and are, cases such as she describes in a society which represents only a very small feature of English life, and is, in no sense of the word, representative.

In spite of all the allurements of riches, the ostentation and extravagance of to-day, and the temptations which money offers to women, we maintain that the hearts of girls in England are pure and single-minded, that the men they choose to be their helpmates and companions in life are the men they love, and however well gilded or attractive

may be the advantages which money without love holds out, they have no chance in competition with the affection which develops into the glamour and ecstasy of a pure, genuine passion. It would be useless to ask Marie Corelli to pause in her denunciations of the mother who, however much she may see her child suffer momentarily, prevents a marriage where poverty would be the inevitable companion of a lifetime. But she would surely not deny that the mother is justified in stopping a marriage (however great might be the affection) where the whole of

two lives would be spent in an unequal struggle with privation and need. It is so easy to blame such a woman and inveigh against her worldly-mindedness. But a mother can never forget that there are wider considerations than the present happiness of two people who enter into a marriage where there is barely enough for them to make two ends meet. The destinies of unborn children have to be considered, and she may well be justified in putting her veto on a contract which may bring beings into existence for whom no adequate provision is possible.

Marie Corelli may say what we urge is a justification of her contention, and she may so construe it if she likes. All we maintain is, that the evils of which she complains are only exceptional, and if they exist, they exist only in a society which is not to be taken as representative in any sense of the word, nor are they the outcome of any age or system, but have always existed. There have been mercenary, selfish women since the creation of the world, and to some natures the temptations which wealth offers will always be irresistible.

But because this may be true of a few, it is unjust to brand and condemn all Englishwomen, as Marie Corelli is prepared to do. We may be more selfish, more luxurious than formerly, and the weaknesses engendered by such influences may be more apparent; still, we maintain unhesitatingly that the Englishwomen of to-day are no less governed by the sentiments of affection and passion than their ancestors, and are just as ready to join their lives with those of the men they love. Every day we see men and women in every class marrying, who have

neither great wealth nor even the prospect of it, but who are content to lead lives of self-denial, consecrated by that love, the very best and purest of which human nature is capable, which will never be tarnished or destroyed by any of the changes which affect the more mutable affairs of life.

F. A. Steel

By

FLORA ANNIE STEEL

III

THIS title, "The Modern Marriage Market," conveys to my ear a distinct flavour of blame when taken as a whole; but when I come to dissect its alliterations, I find myself in doubt where to lay the accent of accusation. Should it be on the "modern," the "marriage," or the "market"?

So far as the adjective is concerned: I think the plaint may be dismissed summarily. Personally

The Modern

I confess myself unable to see the slightest difference in the principles on which marriages are made nowadays and those on which they were made a hundred —two hundred — five hundred years ago ; briefly, since chivalry beguiled the world from the straight path of duty. The theory of marriage, as set forth by Western civilisation, has practically remained the same for centuries ; such theory being simply that the feeling, passion, emotion—call it what you will—which we designate as Love—with a big L—is the only reason which an honourable man or

modest woman can possibly admit, even to themselves, as a reason for marriage. In other words, herein lies the only justification, sanctification, and purification of what would otherwise be unjustifiable.

I think that even the most cynical and *blasé* frequenter of house-boats at Cookham would, if confronted with his own soul, admit that it had a sneaking belief in this theory; while even the most cursory glance at our literature proves that it has as many signatories as the Thirty-nine Articles. Briefly, it is and has been the foundation-stone of our marriage system.

It is scarcely fair, therefore, to blame it as modern. Nor, when we come to analyse the next word, have we any right to condemn marriage as it is. Viewed in the purely personal aspect which is all that a marriage conducted on such purely personal lines as the mutual gratification of feeling can claim, marriage seems to touch a very high average of content. It can boast quite as much success as is consistent with the natural evanescence of all feeling.

Are we, then, to let our tongues slide over "modern" and "marriage" to dwell reproachfully

upon "market"? Are we to lay the burden of blame upon the very idea of commerce in the Temple of Hymen?

One of my predecessors has used the whip of words both to buyers and sellers in this connection, and the other, while deprecating the justice of the reproof in regard to actual facts, has not denied the iniquity of barter.

Nor do I; but I would like to remind my readers that it was not only the tables of the money-changers which the scourge of the Master drove forth from the Temple, but also the seats of

them which sold doves! I would ask them what ethical difference there is in selling yourself for love or for money, if mere personal pleasure lies at the bottom of the bargain?

I make bold to say that there is none. The girl who gives herself for exchange in pure passion is quite as mercenary as the one who sells herself for gold. Both claim their own desire, irrespective of everything but themselves. It is merely a question as to the relative dignity of their ideals in regard to such personal pleasure. A market is therefore inevitable under our

present system, since, whether Mammon or Eros ratifies the bond, English girls are taught to take their equivalent in something which is valuable to themselves, and themselves only.

So it seems to me that the phrase "modern marriage market" should have no accent at all. It must be taken as a whole, or rejected as a whole. We must either say that marriage is honourable in all if we get an equivalent which satisfies our personal ideals, or we must say that neither for love nor for money have men and women the right to enter into a contract which

only concerns themselves for a few short years, but which may influence the world for generations.

Which shall we do ?

To most, no doubt, the very idea of condemning the fundamental principle of our marriage system wholesale may seem more absurd even than sacrilegious. The world, they will say, has got on very well with the help of the little blind god. Lads and lasses have sold their birthright for love since the beginning of Time, and will continue so to do until Time is no more. It is natural, it is proper, it is above all easy for them to do so. The majority of

such marriages are happy, decorous, respectable; and though our social morality is not quite what it should be, that has nothing to do with the question. Our qualms as to what may be going on round the corner in Piccadilly have no right to make our own voices quaver in singing about the one "which breathed o'er Eden" during a marriage service in St. George's, Hanover Square

Perhaps not; and yet the uncomfortable remembrance that the first wedding in this world was rather the reverse of a panacea for all evil makes some of us doubt if this theory of ours,

of which we have spoken, is not responsible for a large portion of the confusion which undoubtedly exists in the minds of many men and women regarding what is called the relation of the sexes.

To say so may seem almost an insult to the hundreds, the thousands of honest men and women who, as their children grow up to take their place in the world, hold each other bravely by the hand till death do them part, and smile at each other even then, knowing that they have done their duty —that they have given their mortality to the immortality of the world; but the heroism, the

virtue of these thousands must not blind us to the fact that the very things we admire in them —the faithful comradeship, the dutiful devotion, the self-denial— are the very things which would have been scouted as a justification of marriage long years before: must not blind us also to the fact that the passionate, absorbing Love—again with a big L— which, according to Marie Corelli, is the only safeguard against making souls and bodies "the traffickable material of vile huckstering," has in nine cases out of ten disappeared.

I shall be told that I am

wrong in saying this — that it has not disappeared. It has strengthened, changed, sobered, risen into a far more excellent thing than it was at first. Then why, in Heaven's name, condemn those who prefer the gingerbread without the gilt upon it to begin with? Why should we extol the man or woman who says openly, "I expect 'Love to teach me exquisite joys,' to 'bring our lives into resounding tune and harmony, so that all the world shall seem full of luscious song.'—I wish to appropriate to my sole use and benefit that which personally makes 'my life

worth living.'—I feel that I must have that 'kiss and no other on my lips,' that hand 'and no other to caress me'"?

Does not that—put, not as I put it, but as the advocates of Love as a purifying element between man and woman put it—sound quite as much like an apotheosis of personal delights as "I expect money to give me exquisite joy, to bring resounding tune and luscious song, etc., etc."?

Compare it, for instance, with the position which our present system condemns, which nine out of every ten women would be ashamed to confess. "I do not

expect intense personal gratification, but I wish to marry, to have a home and children, to take my share in the glory and toil, and here is my chance." If you come to analyse this, you will find, not only that it brings with it a far higher ideal of life, but that it emphasizes something that sorely needs emphasizing: the distance —if I may be allowed so to put it—between Piccadilly and St. George's, Hanover Square. It leaves us with something more as a foundation for marriage than a mutual physical and mental attraction which overpowers other considerations: an attraction

which the individual experience of nearly every man and woman in the world teaches them is evanescent. That it lasts sometimes need not be denied. But its persistency certainly seems to vary in inverse ratio to its intensity: those who feel it most keenly being, as a rule, those who are liable to feel it most frequently. This, indeed, is almost inevitable, since both the strength and the frequency argue the same cause, an emotional nature.

I shall be told, of course, that I have utterly failed to grasp the very idea of Love; that I am confusing it with passion.

The Modern

I do not think I am, if the latter word is meant to carry even a suspicion of blame with it. Briefly, it is one thing to fall in love—to be, let us say, very much in love; another to think that it is not only a pleasant but a virtuous act. As a matter of fact, it is a very commonplace, a very natural one. In many cases such Love may prove quite a safe guide; but it is not a virtue to yield obedience to the instinct, as if it were the voice of God.

Yet that it is so, is the teaching which nine-tenths of us almost give to our girls. Nay, more!

It is the universal teaching to both sexes on this point. Take up the most sentimental fiction of the English school, or the most realistic of the French, and you will find them alike in this underlying assumption that the attraction of sex for sex is something praiseworthy. In the former the mutual self-sufficiency of hero and heroine, when it dawns upon them that they are really in love with each other, would be unbearable if it were not comic. And if Providence is kind enough to endow their superiors in age with a few sensible doubts, the young people

almost burst with importance over the discovery that the course of true love never did run smooth.

The same thing is observable in the realistic novel. The blind little god's arrow is sufficient excuse for murdering one's grandmother, to say nothing of one's lawful wife. No doubt the treatment of this theory differs, but a careful reader can scarcely avoid coming to the conclusion that the emotion which leads, in the sentimental novel — after an intolerable amount of strong love-making — to wedding bells, is virtually the same as that which culminates in the necessity for

propriety to use the "candle, the bell, and the book."

The drama, in both, begins on the old classical lines; youth, propinquity, an all-absorbing selfishness, a mental and bodily exaltation which is intoxicating as wine. Now, if this be so, the wrong—if wrong there be—must be in the end which differentiates the two similar beginnings.

But if the end in both be a purely personal gratification, it is hard to see why one should be blessed and the other cursed utterly. Still harder it is for any one to lay down the law and say, as the advocates of "all for

love and the world well lost" theory do say, that you may seek the happiness of personal self-gratification through the mind but not through the body; through the sensual pleasures which can be bought by love, and not through those which are to be bought by money. The distinction is a purely arbitrary one. Self lies at the bottom of both decisions. The money-changers and the sellers of doves alike turn the Temple into a market-place.

Of course, the retort will once more be that I fail to understand what Love with a big L means,

and that, even admitting the earthly element, which must count for something, there still remains the mental sympathy—the friendship, the honest, unselfish desire to stand by each other to do the best for each other, in every way, which is the essence of real love.

Undoubtedly it is. So much so, that I retort, in my turn, by asking why this should need the sanction of an ephemeral passion? Why, briefly, should it be right for a woman to crave a "luscious song," and wrong for her to be content with the still small voice of an approving conscience? Why should she be allowed to

forget duty in pleasure, and forbidden to forget pleasure in duty?

Women have not so learnt their rights, their privileges, their duties in those Eastern lands with which I am best acquainted. There, hidden under a thousand blemishes, a million abuses, still lingers the great truth—so unpalatable to our Western individualism — that man and woman stand related, not to each other, but to the immortality of their race — that immortality which comes to the world through the generations on generations of men and women who are born into it. There, even nowadays,

when error has obscured so much, marriage is not a purely personal matter, as it is with us; it is a duty to the race.

I am not, however, going to advocate the Indian system here (with child-marriage, female infanticide, and *sati* thrown in as make-weights)—though my personal experience is that, even with polygamy superadded, the percentage of rational happiness derived from wifehood and motherhood is as high in India as it is in England. I only wish with all diffidence to ask each thinking woman if our present ideal of what justifies marriage

does not put St. George's, Hanover Square, into dangerous proximity with Piccadilly. To use one and the same bell for weddings and exorcisms is confusing to the multitude, which has but the one sense of hearing ; yet, if we admit the sanctifying power of mere emotion, it seems to me impossible to avoid so using it. For experience—every-day experience of the world—teaches us that it is impossible even for the principals themselves to tell beforehand whether the Love which prompts their marriage will stand the strain. They may hope it so, wish it so, pray

that it may be so; but very few men—or women either, for that matter—could truthfully say, as they stand at the altar, that they never felt a similar emotion before, or predict that they would never feel it again. Perhaps it may be said that I exaggerate this teaching. Let us go back to what has been written in these pages about it.

"What is marriage?" asks Marie Corelli; then answers the question by saying that it is the taking of a vow before the Throne which declares that the "man and woman concerned have each discovered in each

other his or her true mate—that all the world is a mere grain of dust in worth as compared with the exalted passion which fills their souls, and moves them to become one in flesh as well as one in spirit."

Lady Jeune, again, gives it as her opinion that with a pure and single-minded English girl, nothing has any chance in competition with "the glamour and ecstasy of a pure, genuine passion."

These are no uncertain utterances. They point unerringly to the thesis that this personal emotion—call it what you will—

is in itself sufficient to warrant entering into a lifelong contract into which, to say the least of it, many other considerations should enter: a thesis which is largely responsible for making the standard of social morality in the West so low.

For it is low. Whatever the theory of twin souls may have done towards personal happiness, it has certainly not enabled us to rise one whit higher in regard to social and conjugal morality than those who hold marriage to be a thing apart from Love.

In truth, the quarrel goes deeper than a mere dispute as

to the relative greed for pleasure of the Englishwomen of to-day and their sisters of yesterday. What has to be settled is the question whether, as Marie Corelli puts it, "marriage is nothing more nor less than a crime if it is entered upon without the mutual supreme attraction and deep love which makes the union sacred"; whether a marriage without ecstasy is a "*selling of the body into slavery*" (the italics are mine). Is this so? Or do we touch here on the mother error which has done more to lengthen the record of our divorce courts than any other cause,

and which, even when it stops short of that, sells the soul of many a good woman into something worse than slavery,—into the loss of her own self-esteem, into a sense of perpetual degradation: the assertion, briefly, that the duties of wifehood and motherhood are in themselves debasing?

"Try," goes on Marie Corelli in her eloquent appeal, "to feel, to comprehend, to learn the responsibilities invested in Womanhood."

Never was more admirable advice given; but why stultify it by setting as the highest

responsibility the duty of "being kissed" as she likes to be kissed, caressed as she likes to be caressed, of giving herself "without any consideration whatever to her pre-elected lover"?

Would it not be better advice to bid our daughters claim that right of reasonable judgment which Lady Jeune excuses in the much-abused mother—the right of remembering "that there are wider considerations in marriage than the present happiness of two people, since the destinies of unborn children have to be considered"?

It seems almost incredible that

at this time of day it should be necessary to insist on such a palpable truism. That it should be so speaks volumes of blame, not so much for the Modern Marriage Market as for the theory of marriage which has inevitably led to it.

It is time this was altered. The changing conditions of woman's life in this nineteenth century of ours make it imperative that some more certain guide should be chosen than that which leads alike to Piccadilly and St. George's. In the old days, when women had little else to do, and still less to choose,

this dream of personal happiness was not so dangerous as it is now, when we have begun to ask questions and insist upon answers. Take a middle-class family of girls, for instance; nice girls, good girls, pretty girls. Half of them cannot hope to marry. But which half? There is the crucial point. If, when they were born, Providence wrote on their foreheads, "This one is to be married, this one not," it would be well and good. But it can never be safe to din the claims of personal pleasure and pure passion—as they are dinned by most purveyors of fiction

"*pour les jeunes filles*"—into ears which may never have the chance of listening to the passion itself, or, what is worse, may have to listen to it without the mysterious sanction of marriage.

It is always unsafe to live in the mental condition of that large section of unreasoning humanity which loves to sit in a basket and then lift itself up by the handles. Pure passion is the sanction of marriage—marriage is the sanction of pure passion. Here is the position with a vengeance!

In truth we need a surer guide, a more bracing and wholesome gospel.

We must go back to what our Eastern sisters have never left; to the sanction of home and motherhood — a sanction which there is grave danger, in this age of individualism, will soon be lost sight of altogether.

Men have already almost lost their fatherhood, from the very extent of their personal freedom in regard to it; and though this is not the place in which to discuss that aspect of the question, the fact that this is so must fill the minds of the thoughtful among us with dread, lest the emancipation of women should

lead to a like loss of the highest function of humanity.

For it is the highest. The Angel of the Annunciation carries to woman the most honourable of all messages, gives her the most noble mission she can have. For the world still waits for the child that shall be born—for its greatest poet, its greatest statesman, its greatest philanthropist: briefly, for the man who shall right the wrong in all times, all places.

And it is to the thought of that child which is to come—that child with its message of peace through self-sacrifice, lying

in its mother's arms, perhaps in our own—that we women must look for the solution of many a problem which now angers the world and us. As of old, the purification of the Temple will come through that message of Annunciation; but the hand of the Messiah must overthrow the seats of them that sell doves, as well as the tables of the money-changers.

S. W. Malmesbury

y

USAN, COUNTESS

F MALMESBURY

IV

"Lord Thomas he was a bold forester,
And a chacer of the Kings deere.
Faire Ellinor was a fine woman,
And Lord Thomas he loved her deere."

THE condition of mind so artlessly described in the old ballad quoted above, belongs to the aboriginal class of emotions which is neither ancient nor modern, but co-existent with human nature, and against which education, civilisation, and luxury fight in vain. As every creature born into the world presents a

fresh and sensitive surface to the impressions of experience, and only learns too late, as a rule, to profit by that of others, so the successors of Lord Thomas and Faire Ellinor, as they walk together in the vernal pageant of their youth, contemplate themselves and their heart-adventure with astonishment, awe, and an honest, hearty, wholesome belief that no one ever loved before as they do, nor ever can again so much as guess at the unearthly beauty of a light which seems to shine for them alone. Upon this simple but solid foundation the edifice of marriage mainly rests,

and I fully believe that in the majority of the unions of to-day this feeling plays an important part.

If any one should doubt this statement, let him spend a week in a country-house alone with any young engaged couple, chosen at random among his acquaintance. It will probably be a painful experiment, since his unhappy personality, unillumined by the Shekinah of their mutual interest in one another, will remain plunged in a gloom which will seem all the darker for the brilliant radiance near at hand.

But the foundations of a building, though first in importance, are only the beginning of a complicated structure, and it is my desire to follow as closely as I can the details of an institution which has existed so many thousands of years, and has, from age to age, learnt, partly to adapt itself to the needs of a nervous and impulsive race of beings, and partly to act as a restraint on qualities, not in themselves actually bad, but hurtful when exercised without control. I wish to guess at what should and perchance might be, and at what seems practically attainable in the

present state of society. But first I must glance at the three views of marriage now laid before me: the Romantic, as presented by Miss Marie Corelli; the Social, as understood by Lady Jeune; and the Practical, of which Mrs. Steel is the prophet.

The first of these writes with a skilful pen, a warm heart, but an undisciplined mind. It is, no doubt, a happy state to be in, that in which we are unable to see more than one side of every question, and one which, in addition, seems calculated to endow the world with saints and martyrs whom it

piously reveres, but whom it shows no signs, at this stage of its existence, of emulating. The fly, with the thousand facets of its eye, must be fairly puzzled at times, one would suppose, to choose its path in life, unless its brain corrects the myriad images the retina receives. It is for us, in the same manner, to order and arrange the many different facts and sides of life which pass before our gaze. A good delusion and a strong prejudice serve as a goal in the steeple-chase of our career, and as blinkers to keep us in a narrow and perhaps a useful path; but

in studying a question in order to arrive at the truth, whether palatable or not, and above all in claiming to advise our own sex for its highest good, so far as is possible, every point of view should be considered, every element in the case weighed in the balance. To look at marriage from its purely romantic side, or, on the other hand, to bring its utilitarian aspects into too great relief, is unskilfully to mix the ingredients which go to form that compound of experience and intuition which we call a ripened judgment. Marie Corelli draws a pretty picture of

simple, loving hearts in Sicily, but is she very sure that those whom she so touchingly describes as passing rich on over twice as much again as forty pounds a year exhibit more than the negative virtue of content? Would they refuse comfort and affluence if offered them? Comfort, which might mean life or death to either in ill-health; affluence, which would certainly afford advantages to their children such as they could not hope to obtain under present circumstances, and such as they would scarcely have the right to decline?

The sum, in truth, we have to

spend is nothing: the all-important question is, What must that sum be made to buy? What are necessaries? What are luxuries? For I need hardly point out to any one who has felt the grip of an English winter, that what constitutes riches in Capri would mean poverty and privation in a climate like ours. So much depends on the class we happen to associate with, and the sky under which we live. The deprivation of accustomed luxuries, or such easements as we have enjoyed in life, is so serious a matter that it is a well-known factor

in punishment as administered to criminals.

Are we, then, purely mercenary if we urge these considerations on those who have yet to grapple with reality, and have never known the crushing hug of want? To turn to another point: is there a mother in this world who, if she could prevent it, would allow her daughter to give herself "without conditions of any sort" to the first man for whom the woman-nature in her breast had faintly stirred in that slumber where it lies bound by the opiate of custom, education, and hereditary proclivities?

To such dreams of Heaven, natural though they be, there is a cold awakening in the chilly dawn of human experience. Few men, worthy of the name, would accept such a sacrifice or undertake such a charge. Those who have done so, for selfish reasons, have forged fetters on their limbs of which they sometimes hear the clanking all their days. Not the most advanced woman among the vanguard which leads that section of our sisters can live happy and content under the disapproval and avoidance of those she has been accustomed

to associate with. The enthusiasm which armed martyrs for the rack or death is sadly cooled by the daily pin-pricks which accompany any irrevocable step taken in defiance of custom and society, just as a heavy shower of rain will do more to disperse a mob than more heroic measures. No woman, whose heart is single, would recommend another to follow in such a thorny path.

Lady Jeune, who follows Marie Corelli in the discussion, writes from the practical standpoint of a woman who has a wide and intimate knowledge of the special

class which she describes; but she confines herself to that alone. And Mrs. Steel, who succeeds her, is, by her own confession, more conversant with the matrimonial affairs of our Eastern than of our Western sisters. Moreover, she evidently considers the former to be the highest and happiest development of home-life, and that the duties of wives and husbands towards each other should be entirely or chiefly merged in their mutual care for their offspring, which, I may suggest, but for that gilt on the gingerbread which Mrs. Steel condemns, would probably never

come to be a factor in the case. She is evidently of opinion, with Mrs. Malaprop, that it is better to begin with a little aversion; but even that stern lady does not condemn us to indifference all our lives. Why, because a feeling is both beautiful and evanescent, are we not to enjoy and prize it while it lasts? Beauty and evanescence are two of the chief characteristics of existence — beauty which the human eye may never see, and evanescence which oft-times enhances that very beauty we desire or regret. And will the memory of love not serve to prevent our judging coldly and

harshly the faults of those to whom our faith is pledged? And if that only, and no more, does it not fulfil a high purpose between a man and woman whom only death or shame can part, whose interests and whose duties are the same? Love is the fulfilment of the law, the willing, cheerful sacrifice of self for the happiness and good of others, either of a single individual or of the race. It is this that Mrs. Steel constantly confuses with passion.

Another point. Her special reference to the greater regard of Indian women for their children

than is displayed by our sex in this country seems to me to be an unfortunate one. Take, for instance, the motive for bringing children into the world which is well known to exist in many cases: the belief that, if they die without descendants to perform their obsequies, their souls go into the body of an unclean beast. This is certainly purely selfish, and has its root in what Mrs. Steel ought to feel compelled to call a personal gratification, though one which we should consider imaginary. All true love, whether between parents and children or husband and wife,

is, in its essence, free from self; but in both cases it is founded on the strongest and most abiding instincts of the human race. Neither can be said to be higher than the other, as they are not intrinsically good, if I may say so, nor are they bad. They are simply natural; their absence is unnatural, and tends to the deterioration, as their presence does to the preservation, of our kind, having still, as Mrs. Steel would say, a selfish origin, though on the widest basis.

All things, as St. Paul himself admits, are lawful, but all are not expedient. Self-preservation is

a notable example of an impulse admirable in itself and necessary to human life, which must be controlled, or sacrificed even, where wider interests are at stake. Instincts, to be useful, must be recognised as such, not placed on a pedestal and elevated into transcendent virtues, but put into harness, so to speak, and made to draw the cart of life.

Another factor in marriage has eluded Mrs. Steel's quick eye—one that is of the highest consequence to the race. It was touched upon by *Punch* many years ago in his picture of

the Noble Owner and his Prize Short-horn :—

NOBLE OWNER (*very attenuated*) : You certainly are a magnificent fellow.

PRIZE SHORT-HORN : Well, my lord, if as much trouble had been taken to select your father and mother as you took with mine, you would be a magnificent fellow too!

History does not relate what the Noble Owner replied, but he might have pointed out that difficulties of selection increase as higher tests of fitness are required. With us not only physical, but moral and intellectual gifts are

looked for, and it is a recognised, if melancholy, fact that the first and last, at any rate, rarely exist together in any high degree. Different qualities also are needed in the various ranks of life—a fact which our modern system of education does not always condescend to notice; while it is evident that certain natures require certain others as the complement to their own. "The heart of a little man," said a friend of mine the other day, "goes out like a rocket to a big woman," and we see the converse happen every day; while what he said of physical is equally true of mental gifts. The ex-

hilarating and stimulating effect of certain minds upon our own is within the experience of most of us, while another perhaps superior intellect may leave us cold and dull.

Not even the Purdah or the Yashmak can entirely disguise or obliterate a determined character or powerful will, and this we know was as true in the days of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as it is in certain notable instances at the present time.

The little tenement in which, for a few brief years, our soul crouches in unrest, and of which it is in some degree both the

cause and the effect, so effectually separates us from other beings of our kind that each must live apart and die in solitude. This loneliness grips every heart that beats and every mind that stretches forth a feeler in the dark. To find a sister-being one with our own, complete community of thought and aspiration, is the deep longing which consumes both men and women; and to the thoughtful mind, denied fulfilment of its holiest and dearest wish, the most convincing proof of life beyond the grave. This desolation of the soul, "divine despair," which feeds

upon our inmost heart, and which spurs a noble nature to exertion, is the same force, but transformed, which drives the weaker creature to perdition. We cannot live alone, and, meeting with another isolated entity, we think to find in it the silver key to loosen our disquietude, and to unlock, each for another, the guarded secrets slumbering, scarcely dreamt of, below the surface we present to the open, if inscrutable, book of persons and events, whose pages slowly turn before our eyes. We search, as did Faust of old, for the Helen of our lives, and when, at last, like him, we say to the

flying moment, "Stay! thou art so fair!" it melts beneath our touch. No reality—if, indeed, there be such a thing—can reach the beauty of our pictured thoughts, and we are doomed from childhood to smart beneath privation and regret.

This bitter discipline, rightly endured, moulds the character and develops the muscles for the Olympic Game of life. Nerve feeds on danger, and courage on necessity; while sorrow, nobly borne, weaves a steel strand into the cable of experience, which strengthens it for those who follow in our traces.

This hope of fellowship and effort to attain perfect union, the practical outcome of our solitude of heart, is the motive power which drives some of us to marriage and some of us to sin.

After an early stage of existence, men are much less likely to "fall in love," as it is called, than women, and especially girls who are less in contact with the real world, and unacquainted with its sterner side. It is therefore far more important that they should be protected against themselves, and it is certainly the plain duty of every mother to

lay before her child the inevitable consequences of an imprudent marriage. Most girls in the upper classes know nothing of the value of money; they are brought up in comfortable, or even luxurious, homes, by parents generally indulgent, and are as incapable of judging of the merits of a possible husband as they would be of the points of a horse. Such a girl might, as likely as not, choose a high-stepping, flashy screw, and pay for it the ruinous price of a spoilt life. It is the act of a friend, though a painful task, to tear aside the veil which ignorance or native innocence

and a pure heart hang before her eyes, if by so doing she can be saved from an irretrievable blunder, the punishment for which is as heavy, alas! as for a crime.

Girls are now highly educated —so far as book-learning can make them so; they are allowed freedom undreamt of twenty years ago, and the superficial knowledge of life they thus acquire is one of the most dangerous elements in their present condition. An attitude of independence, an indisposition to listen to advice, combined with total ignorance of the real situation

they are bent on creating for themselves, is a spectacle which would be ludicrous if it were not melancholy to those who know by experience the difficulties which beset a woman's life, even under the most favoured conditions. Authority being admittedly obsolete, all a mother can do is to create and maintain, with infinite patience and affection, such an influence over her child's mind as will allow of the latter being guided aright when she comes to the place where two roads branch. To know how to look for the qualities which stand the wear and tear of life in

common, and to learn that all that glitters is not gold, is one of the first steps in our education. Neither brilliant personal qualities alone, nor wealth and position by themselves, can satisfy the heart which is formed to look, often against its conscious will, for something higher, for that invisible but possible perfection to which the caged bird sings its sweetest songs. It is this search for the ideal, and the fond belief that it has at last been found, which wrecks so many lives and makes the searchers do wrong in secret, or bear open shame for the sake of the treasure which they think

at length is in their grasp, but which often turns to ashes in their hand.

It is therefore inevitable that marriage should produce a large amount of disappointment, which may best be overcome by reflecting on our own shortcomings rather than on those of our companion. Partners in a happy marriage must bring a certain capital of youth and health, and in addition qualities, moral and mental, such as are necessary to advance them in their condition of life.

"Choose not alone a proper mate,
But a proper time to marry."

Marriage Market

You do not require your carriage-horses to wait at table, neither does your pet dog pay the household bills; but in human beings we are apt to look for qualities quite as incompatible as these, and to marry in the fond hope that the particular thistle we have selected, unlike all others, will bear a fine crop of figs.

Marriages between different classes in Society rarely turn out well. Early influences are seldom, if ever, eradicated, and where two people look at life from opposite points of view there must be constant straining

of the tie which binds them to each other.

Those who marry into a class above their own are almost invariably huffy, and constantly on the outlook for slights. Where this is not the case they may easily become overbearing or purse-proud. When, on the other hand, they marry beneath them, they find their new surroundings impossible to conciliate, and themselves accused of pride or "airs." Most frequently is this the case where a lady marries a working man. The tie shortly becomes as irksome to him as to her, and he finds her delicate and useless,

unable to do the hard work expected of the women to whom he is accustomed; while the very sense of inferiority, which constantly haunts him, renders him uneasy in her presence, and sometimes even drives him to ill-treat or desert her altogether.

I came across an instance of this kind, not long ago, in a pretty creature, still young, but roughened by toil, who had formed a union with a working man. Shunned by her own people, and finally abandoned by her husband, she had been found and rescued from the lowest depths of degradation by a kind and charitable lady.

The Modern

Difference of race is generally a great handicap to contentment in conjugal life. Even between European nations difficulties are apt to arise: how much more, then, where colour prejudices step in. This sad lesson many of our girls have learnt in India, where they find their position almost untenable, while the men they marry, returning to their own people and former habits, undergo a strange and terrible transformation in the eyes, at least, of their English brides, who are awakened too late to the truth and to the inherent differences of race and inherited characteristics

which even a European education is powerless to remove.

Imprudent marriages, where means of support are inadequate, are more frequent with us than on the Continent, where, particularly in France, the whole affair is treated more as a family arrangement. The position of the woman in her own house seems to gain, rather than not, by this way of looking at the matter, and on the whole the average results appear to be satisfactory.

Restrictions on marriage are common in Continental armies, where, in certain cases, officers

are obliged to ask the consent of their colonel, who is instructed to institute a full inquiry into the lady's character and financial position.

With us these regulations are confined to the men, four or five per cent. of whom only can marry "with leave." This does not, of course, compel the remainder to remain single, like Zulu warriors, but excludes their wives from certain privileges which those who are "on the strength" enjoy; free quarters, for instance, and such employment as can be reserved for them.

Mercenary motives are far from

being confined to the upper ranks of life, and from inquiries I have made I learn that a woman of the working classes, with "a little bit of money," is just as much run after as great heiresses in Society by fortune-hunters, and just as likely to be cast aside when that little bit of money is spent.

I have said that equality in social position is an important factor, and that serious racial divergences should act as a bar to marriage. Furthermore, for the sake of any children which may be born, persons suffering with hereditary diseases ought to

remain single, and the very immature unions which take place so frequently — for instance, in the East End of London—should be discouraged and prevented as much as possible.

Beyond these initial points, I hold that we ought to look for physical beauty, which in itself includes so many other qualities; for evenness of temper, and the greater moral and intellectual gifts which go to widen and heighten the horizon of our life, and which bring unfailing consolation in time of privation or sorrow. The power to occupy the mind, to divert it from cares

when by no taking thought can trouble be averted or suffering relieved, is one of the most precious gifts that a man or a woman can receive or acquire, and one which must tend to sweeten the life they have solemnly undertaken to spend together.

These, I shall be told, are all counsels of perfection; but in reply I may remind my readers that he who "aimeth at the sky, shoots higher far than he who means a tree." We can at least look up, and some day hope to scale the snow-clad heights which look so inaccessible from below.

Marriage Market

And in the meantime let us say with the Preacher :

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

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